

Engage your heart when listening to your spouse¹



*"This is the image of God:
love, God's covenant with us
is represented in that covenant
between man and woman.
And this is very beautiful!"*

*Pope Francis, General Audience:
Sacrament of Matrimony (April 2, 2014)*

I remember when Tony and I were first married, we communicated our love for one another with little non-verbal cues when we wanted nobody else to know what we were conveying to each other. Little secret codes if you will. We'd go out to dinner with friends or to a concert or event and would look at each other, and, with a twinkle of the eye, we'd signal that we loved each other and were happy to be together.

Fast forward to today; our children are grown up and away from home, and we are alone with each other as when we first married. We still enjoy sending these little messages when we are in public places and realize more than ever how important our shared communications are.

Research shows that 55 percent of what we communicate is through non-verbal expressions. Thirty-eight percent is conveyed through our tone, and only 7 percent is conveyed through what we say. It is no wonder that sometimes we have difficulty truly getting to the heart of our discussions with our partners.

Throughout our marriage, Tony and I have found that good communication requires good listening or, as the counselors and specialists refer to it, active listening. But isn't listening an action, you may ask. It is, but we can improve our skills to ensure we are not only hearing that 7 percent of the message but understanding the other 93 percent as well.

5 simple steps have helped Tony and I listen to the heart of each other:

- *Pray together* before each conversation if you're not entirely comfortable then each pray silently. It sets the proper mood and intention for the discussion.
- *Dedicate a daily time to check-in with each other*; schedule it **as** you would any important appointment.
- *Remove all distractions* (silence your phones; turn-off the television; have your children engage in a self-directed activity).
- *Listen to verbal and non-verbal communication* (sometimes we are too tired or hungry or sad or stressed. It is more important to understand these cues if we are to be successful listeners).
- *Agree to disagree*. Being unified doesn't mean uniformity. There are going to be things, topics, opinions you disagree on and recognize that it's ok.

Employing these five simple practices can help remove the barriers that can block intimate communication and develop skills that help us communicate based on love and mutual respect.

Our primary goal in marriage is to get each other to heaven - it may seem like a daunting task, but the path will be enriched if you listen with your heart in order to understand the heart of your beloved.

¹ Socorro Truchan – Associate Director, Domestic Church – Marriage Matters, Diocese of Kalamazoo - 2021